ISSN 0712-7774

$2.25USA•$3.05CANADA•£1.50UK

CEREBUS GUYS

no.19

219
JUN

E X C E R P T

Mrs. Carey went into the study. To collect books was Mr. Carey's only passion, and he never went into Tercanbury without spending an hour or two in the second-hand shop; he always brought back four or five musty volumes. He never read them, for he had long lost the habit of reading, but he liked to turn the pages, look at the illustrations if they were illustrated, and mend the bindings. He welcomed wet days because on them he could stay at home without pangs of conscience and spend the afternoon with white of egg and a glue-pot, patching up the Russia leather of some battered quarto. He had many volumes of old travels, with steel-engravings, and Mrs. Carey quickly found two which described Palestine. She coughed elaborately at the door so that Philip should have time to compose himself; she felt that he would be humiliated if she came upon him in the midst of his tears; then she rattled the door handle. When she went in Philip was poring over the prayer-book, hiding his eyes with his hands so that she might not see he had been crying.

'Do you know the collect yet?' she said.

He did not answer for a moment, and she felt that he did not trust his voice. She was oddly embarrassed.

'I can't learn it by heart,' he said at last, with a gasp.

'Oh, well, never mind,' she said. 'You needn't. I've got some picture books for you to look at. Come and sit on my lap, and we'll look at them together.'

Philip slipped off his chair and limped over to her. He looked down so that she should not see his eyes. She put her arms round him.

'Look,' she said, 'that's the place where our Blessed Lord was born.'

She showed him an Eastern town with flat roofs and cupolas and minarets. In the foreground was a group of palm-trees, and under them were resting two Arabs and some camels. Philip passed his hand over the picture as if he wanted to feel the houses and the loose habiliments of the nomads.

'Read what it says,' he asked.

Mrs. Carey in her even voice read the opposite page. It was a romantic narrative of some Eastern traveller of the thirties, pompous maybe, but fragrant with the emotion with which the East came to the generation that followed Byron and Chateaubriand. In a moment or two Philip interrupted her.

'I want to see another picture.'

When Mary Ann came in and Mrs. Carey rose to help her lay the cloth, Philip took the book in his hands and hurried through the illustrations. It was with difficulty that his aunt induced him to put the book down for tea. He had forgotten his horrible struggle to get the collect by heart; he had forgotten his tears. Next day it was raining, and he asked for the book again. Mrs. Carey gave it to him joyfully. Talking over his future with her husband she had found that both desired him to take orders, and this eagerness for the book which described places hallowed by the presence of Jesus seemed a good sign. It looked as though the boy's mind addressed itself naturally to holy things.

... continued on last page

CEREBUS
NO. 219 JUNE 1997

DAVE SIM
Creator, Writer, Characters/ pencil & ink, lettering

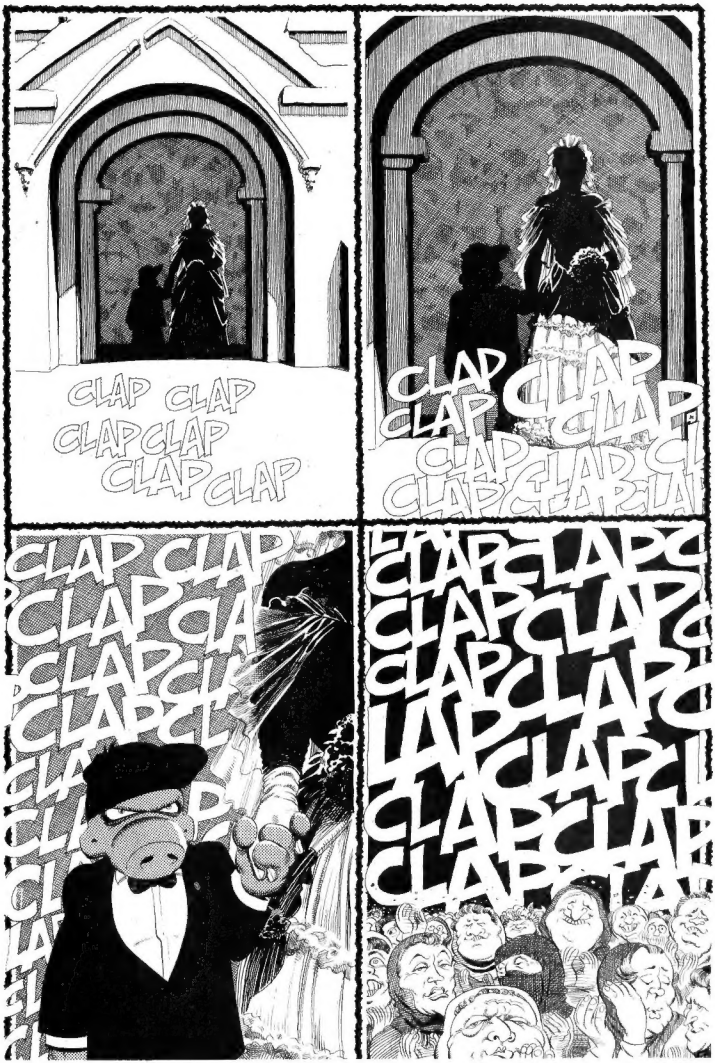
GERHARD
Background Artist/pencil & ink, cover colourist, mechanical tones

CAROL WEST
Administrative Assistant

DIANA SCHUTZ
Proofreading

GUYS
a novel
•
(Cerebus 201 to Cerebus 219)

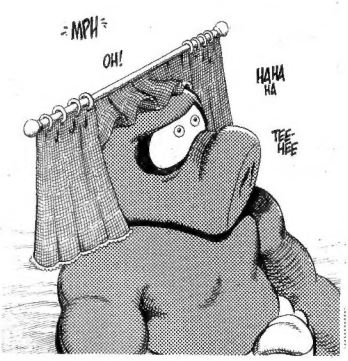
MONTHLY
ALL CONTENTS ©1997 DAVE SIM AND GERHARD
PRINTED IN CANADA by PRENEY PRINT & LITHO, WINDSOR, ONTARIO


CLAP CLAP
CLAP CLAP
CLAP CLAP
CLAP CLAP
CLAP CLAP
CLAP CLAP
CLAP CLAP
CLAP CLAP

CLAP CLAP CL
LAP CLAP
CLAP CL
P CLAP C
BRAVO
APPLAP
CLAP CLAP CL
BRAVO
CLAP CLAP

HWE
CLAP CLAP

JOANNE
JOANNE


=MPH=
OH!
HAHA HA
TEE HEE

AW

CEREBUS?
WHAT IS IT?
WHAT'S
WRONG?
GET!
OUT!
DON'T.
YELL.
(EEK!)
NOW-- WHAT'S THE MATTER.
OH!
AYE.
SORRY
SORRY.
THE MATTER IS
WHAT.
HAHAHA
HAHAHA
HA HA
HA HA
GET!
OUT!
NOW

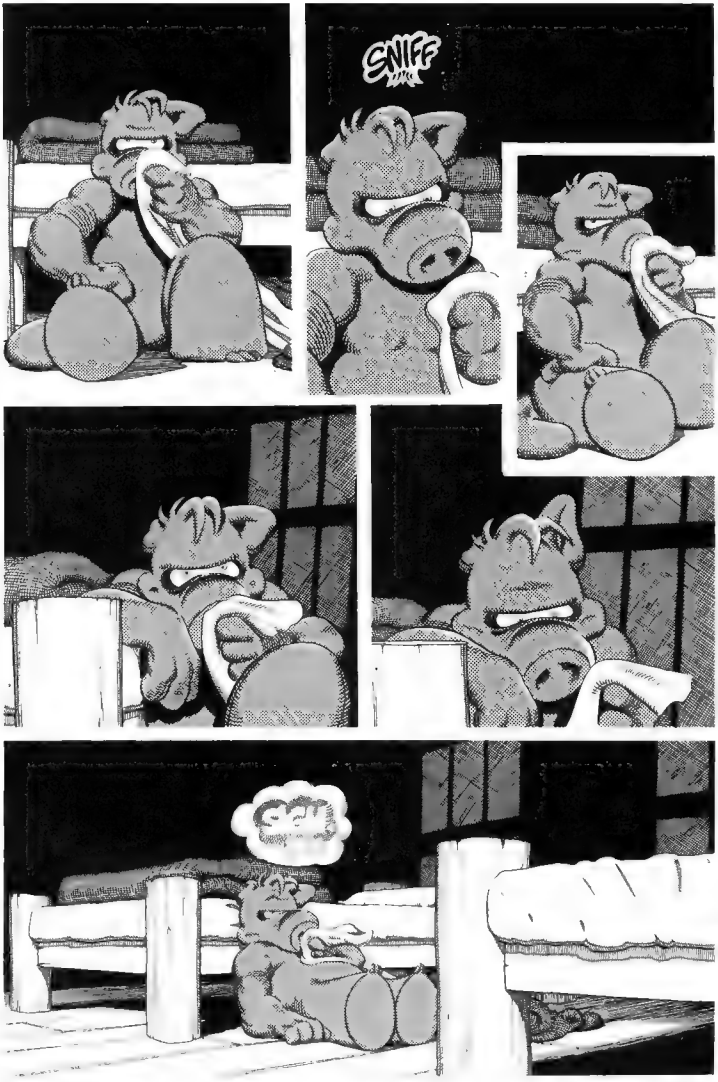
SO!
IS THIS THE WAY YOU TREATED THE
OTHER ONE.
WHAT "OTHER ONE"
HMPH!
YOU THINK YOU'RE SOOOO MYSTERIOUS
RIP SNAP SHRED
?
THE ONE YOU SLEPT WITH EIGHTY-ONE TIMES
I SAW YOUR LITTLE "SCOREBOARD"
ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COUNTER
RIP SNAP SHRED
WELL LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING... LITTLE MISTER
IF YOU THINK BREAKING YOUR "RECORD" IS SOME SORT OF...
"SURE THING"
"SCOREBOARD"
"RECORD"?
STUFF. STUFF. STUFF.

OH... FOR CRYIN' OUT LOUD
THAT'S NOT A "SCOREBOARD"
CAREFUL!
(WHA?) (WHA...?)
"CAREFUL"?
"CAREFUL" ABOUT WHAT?
THINK!
OH YEAH?
WHAT IS IT, THEN?
STOOOP!
(WHY?)
SHUT
STOP!
IID
AMG
HEL
IT'S A CALENDAR
WHAT'S WRONG SO
CTTED
BOUT?
THAT'S HOW MANY DAYS UNTIL CEREBUS IS
LEAV*
ING.
OOPS.
(ANE) (ANE) (ANE)
SNAP.
I SEE.
AND JUST WHE'S WHEN WERE YOU GOI TO TELL
M'S
UHH.
YOU WEREN'T GOING TO TELL ME...
WERE YOU.

HEY! THAT--
YOU LITTLE PIECE OF SHIT!
YOU FUCKIN ASSHOLE!

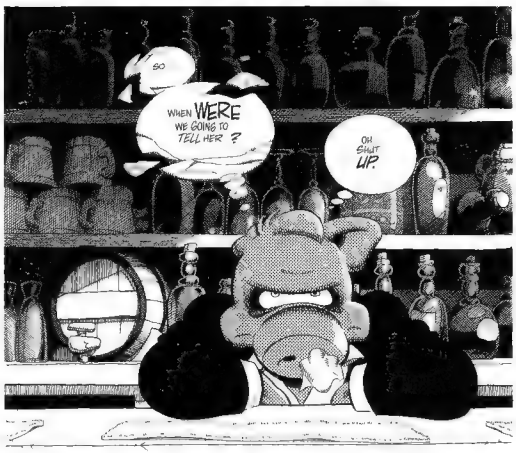
TADUMP
TADUMP
TADUMP
TADUMP
TUMP
TUMP
TUMP
KLIK
KLAK
SLAM

KICK
DRIP
DAB
DAB
DAB
SNIF
WIPE
WIPE
WIPE
DRIP


SNIFF
SNIFF

AHEM.
O MIGHTY TARIM! DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN CEREBUS ASKED YOU TO FORGIVE HIM FOR WHAT HE WAS GOING TO DO WITH JOANNE FOR THE NEXT SIXTY-TWO NIGHTS?
(OF COURSE I REMEMBER - I'M OMNISCIENT.)
(QUIET! CEREBUS IS PRAYING)
(OOPS!) (SORRY)
WELL- IT LOOKS AS IF CEREBUS WON'T BE REQUIRING FORGIVENESS FOR NIGHTS FIFTY-EIGHT THROUGH SIXTY-TWO.
(INCLUSIVE)
(OH, AYE)
INCLUSIVE
SO... HM
(EYES CLOSED OR IT DOESN'T COUNT.)
SO HM
PLEASE CREDIT CEREBUS' ACCOUNT FOR THE DIFFERENCE
AMEN

SNIFF
DAB DAB
KAF
DRIP IP IP IP


SO
WHEN WERE WE GOING TO TELL HER ?
OH SHUT UP.

EPILOGUE

CEREBUS BROKE HER HEART
NAY. SHE BROKE HER OWN HEART... CEREBUS TOUCHED HER RIGHT FROM THE START CEREBUS DIDN'T LOVE HER
SHE'S JUST SORE BECAUSE HER TRICK BREASTS DIDN'T WORK
AYE! AYE! AYE!
CEREBUS IS-- IS HEARTLESS
OH AYE (WHAT'S CEREBUS POINT?)
?!
BUT
BUT
LOOK. CEREBUS DOESN'T HAVE TRICK BREASTS OKAY?
CEREBUS TRICK IS HAVING NO HEART.
?! ?! ?! (HEY!)
YEAH! DAMN RIGHT!
GOOD FOR CEREBUS
YAHOO
WE WON!
WE BEAT THE TRICK BREASTS
BUT BUT
NO HEART! NO HEART! NO HEART!
LES: HAVA DRINK T'CELEBRAID!
NAY! NO DRINKING UNTIL CEREBUS IS DONE HIS
KLIK KLAK
APTERNOON
KLAK

AFTERNOON
SKRCH SKRCH
SNIFF SNIFF
SCRAPE

SORRY TO - um BOTHER YOU
BUT, COULD I GET A PINT OF STOUT OVER HERE?
JUST
WHEN YOU GET A MINUTE, I MEAN
NO STOUT SORRY
TAPS BUSTED
BUSTED
AYE - NOTHING COMES OUT EXCEPT FOAM!
HUNH
YOU
um
MIND IF I SEE FOR MYSELF?

THERE'S A BIT OF A TRICK TO IT
SEE - YOU HAVE TO TILT THE GLASS
AND POUR ALONG THE CURVE
NOT JUST (YOU KNOW)
PULL ON THE HANDLE
I CAN SHOW YOU HOW IT'S DONE
IF YOU'RE
INTERESTED
JUMP!

GIVE CEREBUS A HINT
A HINT?
AYE
MMM
A HINT
WHAT WOULD BE A GOOD
OH! I KNOW
YOU ONCE TOLD ME
HEH
YOU
ONCE TOLD
ME
THAT YOU WERE IN LOVE WITH MY WIFE

FROM HELL

Part 3

On the subject of a hierarchical structure to existence, the Qabalah is again an interesting model because of its sophisticated structure, which allows for many different interpretations of its own nature. On one level, many practising magicians would choose to see the structure of the ten Sephira — or spheres that make up the array known as the *Otz Chiim* or Tree of Life — as a hierarchical one, with sephiroth number one, Kether, as the absolute godhead at the top of the tree and sephiroth number ten, the earthly sphere of Malkuth, down at the bottom. The Golden Dawn based their own highly hierarchical order upon which sphere on the tree one had attained to, working up from the bottom. As a neophyte, one's task is to come to terms with the concept of Malkuth before progressing on up the tree towards the higher levels, eventually assuming the ultimate and possibly chimerical grade of Ipissimus (this is the same as being God, only better, as people tend to respect you more if you're self-made).

Qabalah seems to work fine when operating under these assumptions, but for my own part I tend to interpret the system differently: rather than viewing it hierarchically as a structure with a top and bottom, I see it as a map or circuit-diagram that connects two remote points (Ultimate God and the world of Matter) by the shortest possible route. The energy can flow either way, and the structure itself has no preference. Generally, we tend to think of the moon as being above the earth and the sun as being above that (or, in Qabalah, of Yesod being above Malkuth, with Tiphareth above them both), but, in actuality, there is no "up" or "down" in space, nor, I believe, in the structure of the *Otz Chiim*. If Kether is seen as special for being the ultimate source and godhead of the process that is the Universe, then Malkuth at the opposite end is also seen as special for being the ultimate manifestation of that initial divine explosion. Neither is higher or more important than the other.

Another thing worth remembering is that the Tree of Life arrangement is seen both as a conceptual map of the entire existence and as a map of the individual human soul, the latter being a microcosm of the former. In that sense, every individual has the entirety of the Tree within themselves and the potential to experience it, even though the vast majority may never stir themselves to do so (Inertia being the vice of Malkuth). This is an important point and one which seems to match with some of my own more extreme impressions during these episodes: the most peculiar entities that I believe myself to have encountered, including presences which appeared to be genuine Gods, have seemed to me to be at once utterly alien or Other, and at the same time have seemed to be a part of myself. Now, the rationalist view of all magical encounters is probably that all apparent entities are in fact externalised projections of parts of the self. I have no big argument with that, except that I'd hold the converse to be true as well: *we* are at the same time externalised projections of *them*. In one sense, the simplest viewpoint might be to accept that all manifestations, ourselves included, are simply different stages of the unfolding of one multi-dimensional being into form.

One important magical ritual, known as the Abramelin ritual, demands of the practitioner that he or she remove themselves from society for a given period and work towards contacting the Holy Guardian Angels. At the moment this is finally achieved, the successful Magus must next plunge directly in Hell and subdue the demons there to his or her will. Now, this ritual is very definitely talking about *real* angels and *real* demons, but at the same time it's talking about getting in touch with your highest consciousness or nature and using power drawn from this to bring your lower levels of consciousness, your demons, into line, so that the whole multi-level entity is working in unison and harmony.

I suppose all of this is a long-winded way of saying that I don't necessarily think that we are held in disdain or contempt by whatever forms of consciousness may exist on the "higher" levels. I really don't think that "they," for the want of a better term, see things how we probably would do in their situation. In fact, in my experience, human frames of reference tend to fall away completely if one even ventures a short distance up the structure. Form itself doesn't exist above the eighth sphere, and individual consciousness doesn't exist above the seventh. The sixth is as high as I've ventured as yet, and people who know a lot more about it than I do have advised me that there is less and less to actually experience the higher you get, while the dangers get more and more severe. Kether, the "highest" allegedly attainable point, is in one sense nothing more than the initial concept of existence itself. To go higher than Kether is to venture into a state higher than God that is called the *Ain*. This translates as absolute nothingness, the purest possible state of being. There may be magicians who have gone there, but if so, they never came back.

Now, moving on to what you actually asked about, which was where I stood on the Free Will vs. Determinism issue: if Stephen Hawking is correct when he suggests that Space-Time itself is a fourth-dimensional solid probably shaped a bit like an egg or an American football, with the Big Bang at one end, the Big Crunch at the other, and all other moments suspended forever somewhere between, then I don't see how Free Will can possibly exist. Time, while it is not actually the fourth-dimension in the sense that H.G. Wells popularised it as being (after the theories of C. Howard Hinton, funnily enough), is, as I understand it, more properly conceived as the *shadow* of a fourth spatial dimension perceived by human consciousness.

What this means is that our view of our own three-dimensional body is limited: if you had fourth-dimensional vision and were standing at a point outside our continuum, you would perceive your human semblance as a form of horrifically long millipede that would wind back and forth over every landscape you have ever or ever will cross during the course of your life. The millipede tapers slightly at both ends. At one end is genetic slime and at the other extreme is dust or ash. Now imagine that each section of the millipede is one instant of your life from birth to death, all fused together. The way our perception of time works in this analogy is like a peristaltic ripple of awareness that starts at one end and passes through every segment in the chain of the millipede's body in sequence. As each individual segment is lit up by awareness, it only has awareness of what it is, i.e., a segment located at certain co-ordinates. When the awareness moves on to the next segment in the body, it is aware of itself as a nearly identical segment at a new co-ordinate, and it makes the reasonable assumption that it is the *same* segment and that the segment has moved. In fact, the segment is unwittingly part of a larger organism, and the only movement is the movement of its awareness through that organism's convoluted form.

To quote C. Howard Hinton's own somewhat different way of expressing the notion. "Were such a thought adopted, we should have to imagine some stupendous whole, wherein all that has ever come into being or will come coexists, which, passing slowly on, will leave in this flickering consciousness of ours, limited to a narrow space and a single moment, a tumultuous record of changes and vicissitudes that are *but to us*." (Italics mine.) Unless I'm missing something, this seems to rule out the conventional notion of Free Will. However, to put a bright complexion on things, was Free Will ever that much use in the first place? I have no doubt that against all odds, I *could* move to Hollywood tomorrow, but what would that prove? From a determinist standpoint, it would only demonstrate that I was meant to be in Hollywood tomorrow, in a sense already *was* in Hollywood tomorrow.

Quite aside from that, to some degree the notion of Free Will resides in the mathematics of the situation. As an example, if I take one individual and try to predict whether he or she will marry, divorce, contract cancer, win the lottery, or convert to Catholicism, I'm on a hiding to nothing and I can't win. That individual has free will, and I cannot predict what he or she is going to do, or what will happen to him or her.

If I look at a hundred individuals and try to predict how many of them will contract cancer, how many will marry, how many will win the lottery, and so on, then my chances for making an accurate prediction go up considerably. If I look at a billion individuals, I can make chillingly accurate predictions about what will happen, statistically, to the group. The perception of Free Will is here seen as something that is relative to the degree of mathematical resolution. You individually may seem to have free will, but at higher levels of magnification, you will not be able to avoid doing exactly your bit and no more to see that those statistical figures turn out correctly. There is no Free Will. What happened...happened. What will happen...will happen. This is in certain light a scary and highly claustrophobic thought. Reality becomes a tightly constrained tunnel which we are being forced to walk down, with no way to turn back or take a different route. Sometimes the urge to break out must be overwhelming...which brings me to a very personal anecdote that seems relevant both to the above notions and to the broader subject matter of *From Hell.*

I'm a little uncomfortable talking about this, because firstly it is frankly terrifying, and secondly it is very difficult to explain without giving entirely the wrong impression of what I'm saying. I'll try anyway.

When I was six years old, I was sitting in our living room, in a straight-backed wooden chair, beside the dining table. My Mother, whom I loved dearly, was kneeling at my feet fastening my shoes for me, which I was either too incompetent or too lazy to do myself. On the table there was a carving knife. I remember looking at the knife and realising in a vague and dreamy way that it would, technically speaking, be physically possible for me to pick up the carving knife and stab my mother through the back of the neck. Now, please bear in mind that I did not want to do this, indeed had not the slightest intention of doing it. It was just that the idea had entered my head, out of nowhere.

Upon closer examination, at the kernel of the idea was this: I knew that I was not going to kill my own mother. The idea was unthinkable. I knew that this was definitely not going to happen, in the same way that you and I both know that I am not going to move to Hollywood tomorrow. These things, while theoretically possible, are *not in the script*. Therefore...and this is the nearest my adult mind can get to paraphrasing what was going on in my six-year-old mind...if I *did* stab and kill my own mother, right there and then, then I would have gone outside the script. Done something that wasn't destined to happen. Ad-libbed. I'd have broken through the fake scenery. I'd force the director to come out and give me a talking to. I'd wake from the dream, bust my way out of the relentless single corridor of predetermination into...whatever.

Of course, while given to unusual thoughts, I am not actually insane. Consequently, I didn't stab my mother; I just felt creepy and horrible for ever having had the thought at all. After a while, the incident was put to the back of my mind as just one of the many mental aberrations that mark our childhoods.

What brought it to mind was a quote during my serial killer research that was attributed to Ed Kemper. Now, Ed came to decapitation and actual serial murder later in life, after first serving a sentence as a juvenile for the killing of his own grandparents. For no apparent reason whatsoever, the thirteen-year-old Kemper shot his grandmother through the back of the head. He then waited for his grandfather to get home and shot him too, though this seems more of an afterthought. When asked why he'd killed his grandmother, Kemper said that the gun had been to hand and he'd thought something along the lines of: "I wonder what would happen if I killed grandma?"

I don't know. Maybe I'm interpreting Kemper's comment in light of my own experience, but this seems to me to hint at a similar sort of urge: if we commit the unthinkable taboo of murder, something that is outside the script, then in some way we will transcend the relentlessly ordered continuum of time and reality. We will have done something that was not meant to happen. Of course, as with the Alan Goes To Hollywood scenario…good name for a band, that, incidentally…then we would of course do no such thing. We would not break free of predestination, we would simply find out that our destiny included the pointless murder of our mothers or an equally pointless visit to Hollywood, and always had done. All the same, I can't help wondering whether some variation upon this perverse urge to escape identity, time, and reality might have fuelled some of our more demented killers now and again. A harmless speculation and nothing more. Make of it what you will.

Yes. It's not hard to imagine the claustrophobic awareness of being trapped inside the script as being a source of all manner of mischiefs. Hitler, for example, or people fitting that personality profile wanting to extrapolate that sense of exit-through-breaking-of-taboo into bigger broken taboo – bigger exit. As I consider it, one of the great satisfactions of doing a single story for twenty-six years is the sense of submitting to that deterministic inevitability. The 300 issues exist and have always existed (leaving aside the possibility of my premature demise) in a specific form. The story has always ended the same way. That becomes a kind of life line much easier to hold onto than "I have eighty-two issues and fifteen and 1/4 pages left to fill — what if I do it wrong?" Very reassuring to know that — in one sense — the story is already done.

Taking your millipede illustration (marvellous, by the way), I would see the role of Free Will reflected in the fact that while it is possible to chart the geographic location of the millipede — beginning with birth and ending with death — the millipede is also aware. Which would seem to indicate (I'm really getting out of my depth here) that the Big Football is actually a nearly unimaginable, nearly infinite number of Big Footballs consisting of ...I need a term here...Awareness Possibilities? I.e., you didn't stab your mother with a knife (good boy, by the way), but the fact of the awareness of the potential act drew you from a state where the possibility of the act did not occur to you, to a state where it did. I'm reminded of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount where, in reference to "Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery," he brings forward the new insight that lusting after a woman in your heart isn't good either. He stops short (or I think he, or He, does) of making them equivalent transgressions, but does seem to be pointing in the direction of ...awareness proximities...and the need for self-discipline out of proportion to what was generally accepted as necessary up to the point where he, or He, introduced it.

This ties in with Norman Mailer's insight — relatively early in his career — of the possible nature of God as an Embattled Being. The outcome is not clear. God wrestles with the Devil in a cosmological sense as He wrestles with the Devil in each of us. We have the possibility to fulfil His Plan, but each conscious decision and each act either drains a little of His Essence or contributes to it. If you add in another layer of "imagination" wherein each imagined decision and each imagined act likewise drains a little of His Essence or contributes to it — a layer in which you did kill your mother just because you pictured it so vividly — Free Will becomes an enormous thing to contemplate

The late Diana Trilling, just as an aside, said that when Mailer's conversation got this..."rarefied," I believe was the term she used...she used to ask him if he liked chop suey (or something of an equivalent "grounding" nature). The beleaguered Cerebus *reader can be forgiven for asking, "Where is Diana Trilling when we need her?"*

If we presuppose the existence of an omniscient or near-omniscient or omnipotent or near-omnipotent Being, who is to say that that Being is incapable of arresting the seeming inevitability that the Big Football can only have that shape? Clearly a Stephen Hawking is working with a model that does not presuppose such a Being capable of affecting outcome. As a scientist it would be impossible for him to do so. Perhaps that's the message that science overlooks. Perhaps God's Plan is intended to be a flower, which starts out looking very much like a football in the bud state and then opens out. If He doesn't exist, it is a given that we are a given number of millipedes winding about the bit of ground we have wound about before we return to dust and the Big Football is just that, is only that, and can never be anything more than that.

A great deal could hinge on whether we are just before the bulge in the Big Football or just after it. The fact that (from what I understand) we are currently in a narrow window (cosmologically speaking) where the sun and the moon appear to be approximately the same size when seen from the Earth might have something in common with this. A sign of our "outward boundness" reaching the end of our potential state and the beginning of our kinetic state..

Individual self-discipline to not only resist committing acts of "bad faith," but to resist contemplating them could, in the context of such a speculation, be just enough to "snap open the 'chute" or cause the Big Flower to blossom at the crucial instant when we reach the apogee of the Big Bulge — where presumably a kind of psychic weightless state will obtain before psychic gravitation reasserts itself.

In such a scenario, Stephen Hawking becomes humankind's Ghost of Christmas Yet-to-Be — pointing to our unhappy and possibly inevitable (possibly not) fate. He also becomes a "byword among men" for his folly in presupposing a universe made up solely of matter and energy, his debilitating infirmities a manifestation — a physical Sign from On High. "Physicist, heal thyself." In my view, such a presupposition — it's all just one big football, so let's just grab our millipede happiness where we can get it - is an inevitable "stumbling block" in the path of the arrogant "now-we-know-everything" late-twentieth-century humanist, scientific, if-the-evidence-isn't-capable-of-being-duplicated-in-a-lab-it-isn't-

evidence corruption we have — collectively — become. A failure of will and self-discipline to clean up our individual "contemplating acts of bad faith sphere," which would thus clean up our individual "acts of bad faith sphere," and which would thus clean up our collective "acts of bad faith sphere" — said failure of will and self-discipline having humanism and the core belief that nothing exists except matter and energy as its primary source of sustenance.

Talk about rarefied. I need oxygen.

Do you think awareness — individual awareness — harnessed effectively, is capable of affecting things on such a scale, given your own experiences with it (he asked, limping off in the direction of the medicine cabinet for a couple of Tylenol)?

Tylenol-induced afterthought: I suppose any speculation along the lines of the above would hinge, to a great extent, on whether one conceives God to be inside or outside the Big Football. I would tend towards speculating "outside" although I wouldn't hazard to guess whether any part of your speculative construction would fall "outside" as well. It does seem to me that a construction with two dichotomous, polar-extreme absolute realities (which you allude to) might get chalked up on Norman Mailer's Embattled God scoreboard as a "win" for the Devil, given that you perceive them as having equal importance -- or at least that neither has greater importance.

Well, the idea of sin has always seemed a bit iffy to me in the first place, so the idea that even *contemplating* sin might have any negative value attached to it doesn't really appeal to me. If Space-Time is a coexistent solid with past, present, and future already written, then, as I've suggested above, that pretty well deep-sixes the traditional notion of Free Will. (Wasn't that a film about a whale, anyway?) If there's no such thing as Free Will, then I can't for the life of me see how there can be sin, evil, or the Dark Side of the Force. I've always suspected that the only reason Christian theologians kept the Free Will idea around so long was that the central concept of Sin pretty well falls to bits without it.

Of course, this football of coexisting Space-Time has some other interesting properties when considered morally. For example, if there is truly no linear time as we understand it, then the events that make up the vast hyper-solid of existence can be read with as much validity from back to front as from front to back. The physics, as I understand it, would work just as well whichever way you wrote the equations. Due to the orientation of our perceptions, we read the Universe as following the course of time's arrow, and we believe that the arrow points only one way. This reading of the Universe is, however, not more essentially "true" than its opposite. Hawking's equations for what is happening at the event horizon of a singularity turned out to be *an exact time-reverse* of his equations for what is happening during the Big Bang. The Big Bang is the Big Crunch talking backwards. *Whoo-oo-ooh.* Spooky.

Even stranger is what happens if you bring that premise down from the cosmological to a human moral level: that our lives are as "true" if we view the film in reverse. In this reading of the world our inert bodies are dug up from the ground or magically reassembled in the inferno of a crematorium oven. After a brief period, the brain and heart miraculously start working and we are born as old people. We maybe meet our spouse at the divorce hearing...the relationship feels bad at first but gets better over the years until it reaches one night of absolute magic in our teens or whenever, after which we never see them again. Daily we draw heat and energy from the air with our reversed actions. We invest that energy into the faecal matter that we ingest through one of the two symmetrical time-reverse mouths that terminate our alimentary canal. We regurgitate a healthy amount of food daily. Our teeth sculpt the pulp back into, say, half a potato. Our cutlery will attach the other half to it. Stick it in a pan of unboiling water for a while to take the heat and softness out, then put its skin back on. When you've got a bag full, take it back to the supermarket and they'll give you some money for it. (The money will come in useful when you have to pay the distributors, who need to pay the retailers so that the retailers can give them lots of copies of *Cerebus* back to you for disassembly.) The store will unbuy it back to the farmer (at mark-down, obviously), and the farmer will bury the thing so that it can break down into it component chemicals; turn its chlorophyll back into photons to be hovered up by sunbeams and sucked into the immense fission-reaction that is the sun.

In a construction like this, we enter a charmed and often charming world where the laws of moral cause and effect become strangely altered; serial murderers become midwives. Thieves become benefactors. Artists and writers siphon pictures and stories from the minds of their readers, maybe convert them into perceptions and experiences and events for the childhood that still lies ahead of them. The image of a rose in our mind floods down the neural channels to the retina, where it is encoded in photons. The light pours from our eyes to make the vision of the flower — the cosmos. Tyrants become liberators and vice versa. Sin is a one-way thing that doesn't really seem to hold up in this palindromic world view.

As to whether God is inside or outside the system, I maybe ought to clarify some of the Qabalistic notions I was flashing around earlier: If I understand the system correctly, then God is neither/both inside nor/and outside the system, since God *is* the system. The godhead sephiroth, Kether, is seen as entity at the moment of its creation out of nothing, usually symbolised by a point within a circle. That energy then passes through several modifying stages, these being the various sephira that make up the arrangement of the tree. Having come into existence as a single point of pure being at Kether, it is next given a reference point and expressed outwards by the second sephiroth, Chokmah; is imprinted with the possibility of eventual form at Binah; is nurtured at Chesed; is purged of unworthy elements at Geburah; and so on "down" the tree until it is finally manifested in physical form at Malkuth, the sphere of the physical universe.

The energy is all God. God is existence. When gods are applied to the Tree of Life arrangement, it's

customary to put them in whichever drawer of the filing cabinet they seem appropriate: Apollo at Tiphareth; Thoth and Hermes at Hod; Venus and Nike at Netzach; and so on. The god associated with Kether is usually the One Almighty God, the Creator of the Bible and the Koran. Aleister Crowley, however, made the valid suggestion that Pan might represent Kether as well as any of them: Pan, it will be remembered, is the Greek word meaning "All." God is All. The physical Universe, including our bodies, is the physical body of God. All feeling is the feeling of God; All Self is the Self of God. The only game that can be played between God and the Devil, Norman Mailer to one side, is solitaire. And that, as the Carpenters have wisely remarked, is the only game in town.

Can the thoughts or deeds of one person affect the continuum? Well, yes, but the situation is actually far worse than that: the thoughts, deeds, and minute antennae movements of an *ant* can affect the whole continuum. The continuum is a monstrous fractal tapestry of events, all of which are intimately connected, all of which are ultimately the corpus of one organism (see above). God/Existence is, in one sense, an example of the ultimate fugue.

Speaking of ants and fugues, I'm reminded of M. C. Escher's *Ant Fugue*, and a brilliant written piece based upon it by Douglas R. Hofstadter. This appears in Hofstadter's excellent anthology of consciousness-related writings, *The Mind's I*, and in it Hofstadter considers the anthill as a model of fugue consciousness: the individual ants are chemical robots with nothing that we would recognise as awareness, responding only to pheromone signals. This bottom level of an anthill's consciousness has a more sophisticated level of signal-consciousness that rules it and guides it. This consciousness cannot be said to exist in the mind of any one individual ant, and yet somehow it exists in the complex interaction of all of them. Up above the signal level of consciousness is a level of symbol-consciousness that guides and mediates the signal level beneath it. This level, the unfathomable symbol-level of anthill consciousness, could be said to be the living awareness of the anthill considered as an individual entity.

The players in Hofstadter's story (Achilles, a tortoise, and an anteater, if I remember correctly) admit that they cannot possibly imagine what the symbol-level of anthill consciousness would be like to experience. This is likened to the experience of listening to a fugue: if you concentrate on the individual components, you cannot be so conscious of the elaborate overall pattern of the fugue. If you listen to that overall pattern, you lose awareness of the individual voices from which it is composed. If we substitute "God/Existence" for "anthill" in the story, then the central point remains true. God's consciousness is the whole of the fugue. Most of the time, we can only follow our own individual voice. Occasionally, our consciousness might expand to the point where we get more of a sense of the overall structure of the fugue. The danger of this is that in doing so, we risk losing our own individual voice. In Qabalistic terms, those who achieve the level of Kether could be said to experience the full fugue. By the same terms, very few Qabalists in their right mind would aspire to Kether without intense and serious preparation, since the principal risk is that one will be annihilated — absorbed into that ultimate whiteness, into the full pattern of the music, never to emerge. The individual voice is lost.

On a final note regarding Free Will, it seems to me that the suffocating claustrophobia of the determinist scenario is considerably alleviated by the fact that even if all events happen to a fixed schedule and in a fixed order, we are still at considerable liberty in how we perceive, read, and interpret those events. The divine ghost of Consciousness, which bestows meaning as part of its purpose, can pass back and forth unhindered through the writhing ball of centipedes that is our human world, and it can paint whatever picture it likes of its journeys.

To return, startlingly at this juncture, I'm sure, to *From Hell* for a moment, what we have in the Whitechapel murders is a real cluster of events that really happened in our real human world. The events are fixed and immutable; they cannot be changed any more than the words in the Bible could be changed. However, just as with the Bible, those events can be read in an almost infinite variety of ways. Leonard Matters reads it one way, with a doctor maddened by bereavement inflicting vengeance on whores for a son of his, dead of syphilis Tom Cullen reads it another way, with Montague Druitt sexually insane and murdering five women before throwing himself into the Thames. Michael Harrison reads it with the syphilitic Duke of Clarence in the title role. Stephen Knight reads it and swaps Prince Eddy for his doctor, Sir William Gull. Harlan Ellison reads it and gets his excellent "The Prowler in the City at the Edge of the World." I read it and overprint it with a bunch of psycho-geographical and mythico-historical notions, and we get *From Hell*. When each event has such a multitude of facets…like James Joyce's day in Dublin…then our "imprisonment" within the straitjacket of a predetermined Universe suddenly starts to look more like a trip to Disneyland. Or even to somewhere actually nice.

Well, I'm not sure I'm talking about sin or evil or Evil, per se. If the deeds and minute antennae movements of an ant can affect the whole continuum (and I would tend to agree with that), then I think the individual choice between "0" and "1" has significance out of what we would perceive as conventional proportions. Just a speculation — or a rumination (have to keep track of my own language, don't I?) — but I would tend to see a moral and ethical choice as a moral and ethical choice whether it is viewed on "play," "fast forward," or "quick reverse." I think it's easy to mistake complexity or a larger inventory of facts for knowledge, insight, and/or truth. Better telescopes and spectrographic analysis of data do not to me — refute the notion that God created the stars We have an infinitely more complex picture of the largest imaginable…Venue…for want of a better term, in the Scientific end of things, and (judging from my headache) once you put all of the arcane philosophies and magiks and alchemies into some semblance of a structure, as you have (clearly) spent a great deal of

energy and time doing, you end up with an equally complex picture of the largest imaginable Venue on the Mystical end of things. Even assuming that both models become even larger over the next — say — twenty years (and what reason would I have for doubting it?), the question would still come down to: is God, per se, the accumulation, the sum total of all these structures, or did He create all these structures? To me there's a large distinction between saying, "we are part of God's pancreas" and "we might possibly be housed in the pancreas of a nearly unimaginably large being created by God." Likewise the notion that God is an accumulation of all perceptions of Him. I would agree with your anthill analogy (I loved what Rick Veitch did with the beehive in Maximortal *along the same lines) — there is a being that is created of the sum of humankind, all plant life, the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, the fish that swim, etc., etc., an accumulated Awareness Totality composed of Archetypes and fractal complexities far beyond the capacities of the individual awareness to CONceive, let alone PERceive There are just too many microcosms of that structure in all of the perceptions I have or know about for me to be even remotely inclined to disbelieve its veracity. But, to me, that's not God. Call him Bang-Bulge-Crunch (last seen in* Strange Tales, *issue 77 — I'm sure you remember the classic Kirby cover: "There's no escaping the terror of: Bang-Bulge-Crunch") if you want a name for him, but it or he is still a closed system and not infinite. God is infinite, ergo Bang-Bulge-Crunch is not, by definition, God.*

Picking up on your optimistic last paragraph, I whole-mindedly and (steady, now) wholeheartedly agree. There is a persuasive argument to be made that we are on the cusp of a genuinely more Mature Age where the "no-two-snowflakes-alike" quality of individual awareness and expression is going to be seen as an unanticipated bonus of humanity having not done too bad a job of getting to 1997 more or less in one piece. If we haven't achieved the complete eradication of War and Poverty and Disease and Famine, at least we have learned a few lessons — it would be hard to imagine anyone coming forward at this juncture and presenting themselves as the Next Nixon or an Improved Stalin or the 21st Century's Answer to Joe McCarthy. If we can keep progressing on our present course to a place where divergent philosophies and opinions are seen to be just that — and not grounds for incarceration, oppression, or wholesale purging (or even full retail purging) — I think most of us will be pretty astonished at the general improvement that would result.

I don't want you to think I'm edging away from what we're talking about (although I think we may have clarified the differences between us to whatever extent that is possible — unless you're interested in me bringing out my perception of Mailer's Embattled God for another three-minute round. It is your interview), *but I understand you've written a wonderful graphic novel called* From Hell *What's it all about, then? I'm sure my readers would be fascinated to...*

Just kidding

I often find — long after I'm done with one of the Cerebus *books — that I was telling myself something in the course of telling the story. I mean, quite apart from what I was consciously putting into it (and I find that that sometimes makes me smile when I run across one I've forgotten), my unconscious mind was either warning me about what was up ahead or giving me a more accurate perception of what I'd just gone through that my conscious mind (at the time) was still wrestling with.*

Anything in From Hell *that surprises Alan Moore when he looks back on it?*

I'm sorry, Dave, but your theology is all to fuck: you've clearly forgotten that issue of *Amazing Adventures* during the mid-seventies where Roy Thomas conclusively proved that Bang-Bulge-Crunch was only a part of either Eternity or Ego the Living Planet. I forget which. And, anyway, they were all Kang the Conqueror moving backwards through time. I guess this fundamental religious schism pretty well puts paid to the "Church of AlandDaveology" that we privately discussed, and in fact I've already taken the precautionary move of having you declared an Anti-Pope and Enemy of Mankind. No hard feelings.

Regarding the retroactive surprises that the unconscious can spring on you during the course of a work, although I'm very familiar with the phenomenon itself, I've had a hard time remembering any actual examples of the process with regard to *From Hell*. I suppose the main surprise didn't so much hinge upon one particular sequence or episode as upon the whole of the work: despite my faith in the "high-altitude mapping" approach described earlier, I still found myself slightly unnerved by the way in which subsequently unearthed fragments of information would fit so seamlessly into the parameters of my first scribbled schematic. One example out of dozens would be the details of John Netley's death, his horse colliding with an obelisk. While writing chapter four, with all its emphasis on obelisks and Netley's growing unease with these symbols, I was not even completely sure that any coachman named John Netley had ever existed, much less died in such a thoroughly appropriate manner.

The thing is, if *From Hell* had not been labelled as a fiction and a melodrama from the outset, if *From Hell* had, like nearly all the other Ripper fictions, chosen to describe itself as fact, then I would no doubt have been greatly cheered to find these validations of my vision of "the truth." All Ripperologists spin gorgeous insubstantial cloths of fantasy upon the hard forensic loom of the established "evidence." The problem is that many of them do not choose to perceive the resultant work as fiction. What I would describe as "the plot of my fiction," they would more likely describe as their theory of the truth. In such a mindset, familiar to all conspiracy theorists and *X-Files* fans, any fragment of fact, rumour, or urban myth that can be made to fit with the evolving pattern is seen as strong confirmatory evidence of that theory's reality. Best of all, a *lack* of any evidence can also be interpreted as proof of the theory's validity: Why didn't the police unearth more

evidence about Jack the Ripper at the time? Because they were part of the cover-up. Why hasn't any verifiable evidence from the flying saucer crash at Roswell turned up? Because "they" are keeping it from us.

During the course of writing *From Hell*, I met an author whose books are, I believe, popular in the New Age-Occult market, these being books on something called "psychic questing." The premise behind this, as far as I can see, is that you decide to go on a quest with a couple of mates of yours who happen to be psychic. Maybe you're looking for the Holy Grail or the Spear of Destiny or, I dunno, your car keys or something. Your psychic mates will lead you to a bunch of stone circles, ancient churches, and similar significant sites, picking up lots of clues on the way (many of them psychically. It's just, you know, this *vibe*. You wouldn't understand). Quite possibly, along the way things will go wrong. This is usually a sign that you're under psychic attack, and a quick check with your psychic mates will almost certainly confirm this. Looking in the newspaper, you may find that the 5:15 train from Liverpool to London has crashed that day, which you will sensibly conclude was probably caused by the malevolent psychic energy aimed by your astral adversary, rebounding from your force-screen of white astral light to reap havoc amongst innocent commuters. At the end, you write a book about your true-life adventures. I'm being hideously unfair here, I'm sure, but you get the gist.

Anyway, during my brief conversation with this author, he told me that he himself had been investigating the astral residue of Whitechapel, along with a couple of paranormal pals, and that his findings suggested that my "theory" in *From Hell* was pretty much the way it *actually happened*. I felt as if I was being cruel when I politely pointed out that *From Hell* was, in fact, a made-up comic-book story, with probably about as much bearing upon historical "reality" as Disney's *Pocahontas*. Nothing against the guy personally, you understand, and I'm sure his approach to psycho-geography is every bit as valid as my own, but I really did not want to put so much as a toe into the inviting pool of "The Truth." Truth is a well-documented pathological liar. It invariably turns out to be Fiction wearing a fancy frock. Self-proclaimed Fiction, on the other hand, is entirely honest. You can tell this, because it comes right out and says, "I'm a Liar," right there on the dust jacket. Were I to read the biography of Prime Minister-in-waiting Tony Blair (saw him on a walkabout through town centre a few weeks back. Looked like a fucking Thunderbird puppet), then at the end of it I would still not know where I stood with Tony Blair. I do, however, know where I stand with Hannibal Lecter and the Wizard of Oz.

To get back to the point of this meander, while I was working upon *From Hell* I was constantly unnerved and amazed by the amount of confirming "evidence" that turned up to support my "theory," precisely because I knew that it *wasn't* a theory: it was a fiction. This is a much more strange and wonderful phenomenon than simply being able to say, "I was right all along! William Gull *was* Jack the Ripper!" When the Universe seems to confirm our fictions as opposed to our supposed theories, then this suggests a strange relationship between fiction, mind, perception, and cosmos that is far more gripping than simply solving a whodunit.

I once heard an anecdote about a contemporary magician who decided to put this principle to the test by adopting a belief so strange that nobody could possibly mistake it for reality and then seeing what happened. The belief he decided to go with was that Noddy, the little toy-car driving and belled-hat wearing protagonist of Enid Blyton's children's books, was in fact the absolute creator of the Universe and the God of all Gods. Within a couple of weeks he abandoned the experiment in alarm, finding himself upon the brink of conclusively proving that Noddy was the Supreme Being. He'd come across magazine articles showing freshly discovered cave-drawings of an obviously sacred figure wearing what appeared to be a tall pointed hat with a little bell on the top. He'd read an interview with Enid Blyton herself in which she described a strange vision that had come to her while under the influence of gas at the dentist, in which she had been whisked across the Universe at the speed of light to meet God himself, although he couldn't describe the details of their conversation. This, along with a whole mess of other stuff and previously hidden meanings in Bible passages (Cain is banished to the Land of Nod in Genesis, for example), seemed to indicate that Nod was God and Enid Blyton His prophetess.

With *From Hell*, and in light of the above, I suppose I'd have to say that if there was one line that struck an eerily resonant unconscious chord with what later developed in the book, it would be a line from the prologue, spoken by Robert Lees and included for no real reason other than that it sounded good and seemed appropriate: "I made it all up, and it all came true anyway. That's the funny part."

Me? An anti-pope? Why, if you think your strategic alliance with the Extreme One will serve your nefarious purposes now that he has been cast out by the Five-Fold Asses of the Graven Image...

I really mustn't joke about such things. Having resigned as "leader" of the self-publishers when I was called the "godfather" of self-publishing on CBC Radio, I now have a letter on my coffee table from a new self-publisher calling me the "patron saint" of self-publishing (without the quotation marks). In all seriousness, I find this troubling — the fact that there seems to be neither appreciation nor awareness of anything Larger than that which is in front of the late-20th-century collective nose

I can't help but think that your last reply is of great value in that area We are liars — most charitably we could be described as fabricators or inventors. We take a snatch of conversation, a bit of a book we once read (and have misremembered most times), a fragment of a recollection from our own past, and create a lie that we make as interesting as we can. The value I see in your last reply is that it is somewhat incumbent on us (or, at least, I think it is) to relay to would-be writers

— would-be professional liars a cautionary note about what is in store if they really immerse themselves in it. Call it karma or hubris or a "snare for the unwary" (in the biblical sense of the phrase) that if you go around earning your livelihood by lying, those lies are quite likely to come back to you in — as you put it — "unnerving" ways. Yours seems the most sensible course and the one I've adopted as well. "Isn't that interesting?" and then get back to what you were doing. It might well be a "sign"; it probably isn't a sign, and you're on the slippery slope to L.-Ron-Hubbard-Land if you take it as a Sign. "Isn't that interesting? Oh, almost forgot —I'm out of toothpaste. I must go and buy some toothpaste." I think of Oscar Wilde writing "The Picture of Dorian Gray" before he met Alfred Douglas. Talk about a "snare for the unwary." Jaka has turned up in my life on three or four occasions, but always at a distance or in such a way that it was easy enough to avoid her. Which I do. Having drawn her umpty-ump times, I know the difference between an approximation and the genuine article. Stare at her for a few seconds. "Isn't that interesting? Right, that's enough staring," and back to whatever I was doing.

We traffic in allegories and metaphors and symbols. I don't know about you, but almost every conversation I have with someone takes place on at least two levels. the enjoyable human level and the writerly mind busily dissecting each tidbit and putting it into its little allegory, metaphor, and symbol compartments. I've found I'm much better off paying more attention to the former than the latter. When the situation was reversed — the writerly mind dominating and the human side of things a distant second — being a writer was a burden. It was always in the way.

I've just had a letter from a fan asking if you and Neil and I go out and get drunk together, like regular chaps. I've discussed this with you before, back in my drinking days — that is, heavy drinking days — and the last person I wanted to get drunk with was another writer. The first thing I wanted after coming back from a convention or signing, where I'd been tippling with other creative-type types, was to go out and have a proper piss-up where all I talked about was how the Leafs were doing, whether the coach or the general manager should be fired, and just be an all-around fool à la Guys. Virtually no one that I socialise with in Kitchener has more than the vaguest idea of what I do for a living. "So, you still doing those cartoons?" "Yeah, it keeps me off the streets for the most part" The travel interested them. Some deluded individual or other was willing to pay good money to fly me to an American city and put me up in a hotel, and people come to get my autograph. Now that I don't go to the conventions and such, the "so what's new and exciting in your life?" question goes by the board in pretty short order. "Nothing much, working hard. Always working hard."

It seems the best of both worlds — the gratification of everything that goes into being a writer and artist, having a certain "name value" in my chosen profession, steady work, a better income than most — and just being a face in the crowd with nothing to remind me of the other part of my life when I go home at night.

Having spent a large part of this series discussing the former reality or "reality" (in both our cases), I thought I'd give you the chance to assure everyone that you aren't ensconced in a Doctor Strange-style loft, draped in velvet raiments, with retorts and beakers bubbling, and doorways to other dimensions opening and closing around you as you're reading this.

What's Alan Moore like when he's "down the pub"?

Oh, Dave, if only it were that simple. Alarmed and worried for my well-being, as I'm sure the average *Cerebus* reader must be by this juncture, and much as I would love to reassure them that despite those occult ramblings I do still lead an ordinary life, I'm afraid that would be bending the truth more than a little. The interior of my house looks more like something drawn by Steve Ditko every day, only maybe a little less paranoid and angular. The room I'm typing in now, which is my living room, is divided by a wooden partition that includes an arched, stained-glass window on which the design of the OTz ChIIM is picked out in stars. Periwinkle/violet ceiling, also covered in gold stars. Arched and architectured wooden bookcases built in everywhere, and hardly anything but magic books: big, marvellous looking things. A couple of 1776 bibles. Barrett's *The Magus*. Signed first edition of Austin Spare's *Golden Hind*. A beautiful facsimile edition of *A True and Faithful Relation Of What Passed For Many Years Between Dr. John Dee and Some Spirits*. Three different *Necronomicons*.

Up on the top shelf, the two-hundred-year old skull of a Tibetan monk, inlaid and decorated with silver, the skull cap removable as a drinking bowl. Framed letter from Leah Hirsig, written in Switzerland in 1927 and signed for Crowley. Next to the stained-glass OTz ChIIM, a framed one-panel "Road Bit" from Veitch featuring a dream of me and my mother that he had the same week she fell ill with cancer and which was published the same week she was diagnosed terminal…a lovely, uplifting little cartoon that shows us both filling a gorge with plastic flowers. Chalices. Ouija Board. Sword. Mask. Wand. Jars of incense. Pictures of Gods and Demons and other imaginary things. The robe is in the wardrobe upstairs. I only wear it on special occasions, since it's far too beautiful to just knock around the house in. Orange silk with a periwinkle silk collar and belt. Much classier than that second-hand Oxfam-shop shit that Dr. Strange was always hanging about in.

I suppose the point I'm making is that when I "came out" as a Magician, I came all the way out like a full, screeching drag queen. I openly talked about my experiences and ideas with anybody from cab drivers to members of my family. The mysterious and wonderful thing is that it hasn't made the slightest bit of difference to anything. Everybody accepted it as if, on reflection, it was the most normal thing in the world. I insisted on treating demons, angels, and giant talking God-Snakes as if they were a part of my normal every-

day existence...and thus by extension a part of general everyday existence. Nobody argued, and, indeed, a large percentage would timidly venture some bizarre experience of their own, as if relieved to finally have somebody to breathe it to. I insist that Magic *is* Real Life. I behave as if it is, and everybody just sort of, you know. Goes along.

Maybe my relationship with Northampton is different to your relationship with Kitchener, I don't know. I've always lived here and was relatively well known even before I became involved professionally with comics. If you look distinctive and live in a fairly small place all your life, you end up becoming a part of the landscape that is, if not unchanging and everlasting, a great deal more stable and enduring than most of the buildings that make up the town centre these days. Probably because of the television and magazine exposure back in the 'eighties and the odd bits and pieces since, a lot of people seem to be aware of what I do and who I am. That said, they also tend to leave me alone for the most part, which is why I live here. I do get somebody every couple of weeks who'll come up to me in the pub or the street and say something nice about my work, but then I'll get just as many people who'll remember me from when I worked at the pipe-laying company or who remember me as Chick Moore's nephew. Or even Mad Ginger Vernon's great-grandson. Or Leah and Amber's dad who does the comics and got on that *Pop Will Eat Itself* record.

There's a continuity here that I am much more a part of than I am of the comics industry's continuity. One of the things about that continuity...and I'm mailing you a copy of *Voice of the Fire* so that you'll at least have an idea of what I'm talking about...is that it is very old and scarred and knowledgeable, and that it finds very few things surprising any more. When I told my family (who are all very traditional, no-nonsense members of the traditional working class) about becoming a Magician, nobody batted an eyelid. My mother went into a state of child-like marvel at the Snake God picture and wanted a copy immediately, as did my devoutly Christian auntie. Conversely, neither of them wanted the Asmodeus picture anywhere in the house. Older people who've listened to *The Moon and Serpent Grand Egyptian Theatre of Marvels* C.D. often seem more receptive and less spooked by it than many of the younger types who've heard it. I almost got a sense, during those early weeks, that at least as far as my family went, the idea of somebody deciding to become a magician was just one of those things that *happened* every couple of hundred years. Interesting, but nothing to get excited about, and we've still got to pay the bills, after all. No big deal, but worthy of respect. Probably more worthy of respect than writing comics, which is much less Universal.

Also, to me, Magic is not a strange and alien planet that we visit, so much as a new set of eyes to look at *this* planet through, a new language by which our ordinary lives can be expressed more luminously. For a Magician, walking down the street to buy a pack of cigarettes at the corner shop is a Magical experience. Anything from the licence plates of cars to the candy wrappers in the gutter to the casual remarks of passers-by is a potential source of information or inspiration. The Magician is reading things according to the rules of a different grammar, but he or she is reading the same book as everyone else. There really isn't any need for the Occultist to become distanced from the world by his or her behaviour, although a great many seem to do so. A laudable exception is Austin Osman Spare, the only Magician this century to offer any serious competition to Crowley. Spare rejected his promising art career in the West End, turned his back on that entire world, and lived in the slums of Brixton or the East End, exhibiting in the back rooms of pubs rather than the galleries that he was offered. He associated almost exclusively with the chronic urban poor, not out of any warped middle-class notion of charity but simply because they were the people he most liked to be with. They also probably accepted him for what he was: good at drawing, good laugh to have a drink with, looked after his mates, and could make it rain by drawing a squiggle on a piece of scrap paper. Smashing geezer.

I suppose what I'm saying is: "What you see is what you get." These days, after a great deal of hard work, I have refined the Hydra down to one head. I'm Alan Moore when I'm talking to my daughters, or to my eighty-nine-year-old aunt, or to the police, or to my readers, or to myself. I'm Alan Moore when I'm writing *Supreme* or *From Hell* or my part of this discussion. I'm the same person I am when I take out the bin-bags on a Thursday night. This is not easy, but it is at least possible, and, I believe, desirable.

Okay, I guess I'm all through. Looking down to the bottom of the screen here, I see I'm on page 38 of the document I've christened "SIM 1." Might I take this opportunity to personally apologise to your readers, who have certainly never harmed me, for an experience that was probably not dissimilar to being trapped in a stalled elevator with David Koresh and Charles Manson. Of course, on the other hand, they've never gone out of their way to be nice to me, either, so fuck 'em. They ought to be grateful that they're not personally involved in this conversation, so it's not their Tylenol headache. They ought to be doubly grateful that I'm not sitting in the same room as them, talking to them and making eye contact with them, in which case you can stop thinking Tylenol headache and start thinking temporal lobe seizure. I'm not joking. At least not these days.

Dave, this has been a very enjoyable conversation. Thank you for giving an old man the opportunity to talk about himself at such extraordinary length and in such a prestigious forum. Of course, I realise that if you *really* liked me then I'd have got a cameo in *Guys* like my slipshod, head-omitting collaborator, but I guess I'll learn to live with it. *Cerebus*, as if I need to say so, is still to comic books what Hydrogen is to the Periodic Table, and is one of the only comics that I still read and enjoy regularly every month. Alright, so this is only in the hope of finding myself face down in a pool of my own vomit in some minor panel of *Guys*, but you must learn to take compliments graciously.

Incidentally, I had this dream of the last issue of *Cerebus*...the last page of so, in fact. He was ascending towards some sort of minimalist special effect, and it was in *colour*. I remember there was quite a bit of azure blue. That's all I can tell you.

My very best to you and Gerhard. Get over here again soon, and we can continue this conversation over cold beers and hot temporal lobe seizures.

Take care,
Alan

Well, I'll certainly be taking you up on that *particular offer. Perhaps this November or the next I think would be appropriate, given that the late fall is the season of each of the chapters of* Voice of the Fire *(ISBN 0-575-05249-X, Victor Gollancz imprint, the Cassell Group, Wellington House, 125 Strand, London WC2R OBB. £10 plus postage). Just as an aside, I read the book on a recent vacation with the girlfriend and having left it behind when we were switching hotels -- it provoked the nearest we come these days to a serious argument when I insisted we had to go back for it. NOW. RIGHT now. Priding myself on my singular immersion in my Judeo-Christian heritage (of very recent vintage), I fancied the ectoplasmic Alan Moore snickering into his orange silk cuff at the devotee of the Lamb of God barrelling down a Florida highway, ardent to reconnect with the Magician's Booke.*

With as much grace as I can muster, thank you for your compliments on Cerebus. *Of course all of the cameo appearances in* Guys *were self-publishers and self-published characters (I had to substitute* Hilly Rose *for* Katchoo *at the last minute when Terry Moore went "over the side" — such a changeable landscape), but there are three novels remaining in the* Cerebus *saga and my competitive nature won't allow your incarnation in your ancestrally challenged collaborator's* Bacchus *series stand as the definitive Alan Moore character (which it is — at the moment) in comic-book land.*

My relationship with Kitchener is very different from yours with Northampton, which is probably to be expected, having as much to do with the distinction between the relative newness of this city and the "old and scarred and knowledgeable" quality of your own stomping ground. As I'm fond of saying, most places in the United Kingdom have pubs that are hundreds of years older than Canada itself. Voice of the Fire *is marvellous in conveying exactly that sense of very, very deep roots that permeates the North American awareness (mine, anyway) when travelling around your quaint little island (I'll nod, Alan, but I shan't kneel, you know).*

It's been an exhilarating experience, our little exchange of views (little, he says, as the Dave Sim/Alan Moore fax file enters its second trimester on top of the office filing cabinet). And if our respective belief systems remain intact — mine, that Alan has fallen prey to the implied limitations of Bang-Bulge-Crunch and his Legions of the Fallen and We Won't Get Up and You Can't Make Us, and yours (correct me if I'm wrong) that Dave has been gulled (oblique From Hell *reference) by that peculiar Solar Redeemer cult that got Way out of hand and has closed himself off from all this Really Cool stuff that is only a pentagram and a ritual away ..*

Well, at least we have avoided dredging up the really old business. Like Nero immolating our crucified lads when he found himself short of patio lanterns for one of his little garden parties, or all of the magnificent pagan temples and statues that fell to the wrecking ball. "Old and scarred and knowledgeable," indeed. If there is more than enough recrimination to go around, I would hope that we have at least arrived at a place in history where, with insight born of overview, it is possible to attribute the largest blame for past atrocities on the imposition of systems of belief by force.. and to recognise that it is the imposition *— and not the beliefs — that needs to be eliminated.*

Let me also express in answer to your observation that you are far, far more a part of Northamptonshire's continuity than that of the comic-book industry that I can't...nor would I want *to...take issue with that. But I would draw the distinction between the industry and the medium...very, very sharply. With the progress of your contributions to the medium: from* Swamp Thing *to* Watchmen *and* V for Vendetta, Brought to Light, *and* A Small Killing, *and with your (to this point) summit achievement with* From Hell, *it is very sad to consider that future opportunities for a comic-book writer of your stature would be limited to* Spawn *and* Supreme, *entertaining as they are — and, believe me, I find them very entertaining.*

I don't see it as your failure, but rather a failure of the medium and the current configuration in which it finds itself. It seems to me that the medium has always been (and never more so than today) an amorphous being composed of the sum of the awarenesses and actions of the loose community of individuals who are its most active participants and practitioners. A persuasive argument could be made that there just aren't enough crazy people with too much money around anymore, as was the case when I let Bissette off his leash to put together his dream horror anthology and twenty thousand dollars or so later kicked him out of the nest, whereupon he spent thousands of his own money (which he didn't have) to keep it going until he got swept up in Kevin Eastman's singular and selfless Tundra madness, which eventually merged with Denis Kitchen — who was crazy years before any of us were Crazy and selfless. The madness and the money went west and adhered to super-heroes and Hollywood, twin banes for those of us who are always attempting to fry larger fish.

Perhaps no small part was played by that peculiar British instinct to hastily raise up an icon and then just as hastily put it out to pasture (a skill honed to perfection with rock 'n' roll's British invasion). I think you and Neil both had about fifteen minutes to enjoy the laurel crown before would-be British successors and fans began demoting you from the pantheon to the metaphorical British Elba. A most quaint...and peculiar*...little island.*

*I had a chance to spend some time with Neil and Scott McCloud at Will Eisner's 80th birthday party (*there's *a name-dropping sentence if ever there was one). Through good luck, I've been able to just do* Cerebus *for nearly twenty years now. What little interest I have in other forms of art, entertainment, and communication is insufficient to tempt me away from the comic-book field (and I don't see that changing after 2004, frankly). I do recognise that others are not that way. If Neil is drawn to writing a television series or a novel or an illustrated book like* Stardust, *if Scott finds himself lost in cyberspace (I think I've fallen, but it's hard to tell because there is no "Up"), and if you are going to devote your energies to another novel or a CD, well...*

At least the medium...the medium, not the industry...got Sandman *and* Mr. Punch *and* Zot *and* Understanding Comics *and* From Hell *out of you before you left. And maybe you're just on holiday and you'll be back when the madness and the money reconfigure themselves. Maybe not.*

Anyway, thanks — sincere *thanks — from those of us who aren't going on any holidays anytime soon, for giving us — for giving the medium — such a high watermark of an achievement.*

Next issue: Alan Moore's *Conclusion:* FROM HELL

...continued

FROM COVER

But in a day or two he asked for more books. Mr. Carey took him into his study, showed him the shelf in which he kept illustrated works, and chose for him one that dealt with Rome. Philip took it greedily. The pictures led him to a new amusement. He began to read the page before and the page after each engraving to find out what it was about, and soon he lost all interest in his toys.

Then, when no one was near, he took out books for himself; and perhaps because the first impression on his mind was made by an Eastern town, he found his chief amusement in those which described the Levant. His heart beat with excitement at the pictures of mosques and rich palaces; but there was one, in a book on Constantinople, which peculiarly stirred his imagination. It was called the Hall of the Thousand Columns. It was a Byzantine cistern, which the popular fancy had endowed with fantastic vastness; and the legend which he read told that a boat was always moored at the entrance to tempt the unwary, but no traveller venturing into the darkness had ever been seen again. And Philip wondered whether the boat went on for ever through one pillared alley after another or came at last to some strange mansion.

One day a good fortune befell him, for he hit upon Lane's translation of *The Thousand Nights and a Night.* He was captured first by the illustrations, and then he began to read, to start with, the stories that dealt with magic, and then the others; and those he liked he read again and again. He could think of nothing else. He forgot the life about him. He had to be called two or three times before he would come to his dinner. Insensibly he formed the most delightful habit in the world, the habit of reading: he did not know that thus he was providing himself with a refuge from all the distress of life; he did not know either that he was creating for himself an unreal world which would make the real world of every day a source of bitter disappointment. Presently he began to read other things. His brain was precocious. His uncle and aunt, seeing that he occupied himself and neither worried nor made a noise, ceased to trouble themselves about him. Mr. Carey had so many books that he did not know them, and as he read little he forgot the odd lots he had bought at one time and another because they were cheap. Haphazard among the sermons and homilies, the travels, the lives of the Saints, the Fathers, the histories of the church, were old-fashioned novels; and these Philip at last discovered. He chose them by their titles, and the first he read was *The Lancashire Witches*, and then he read *The Admirable Crichton*, and then many more. Whenever he started a book with two solitary travellers riding along the brink of a desperate ravine he knew he was safe.

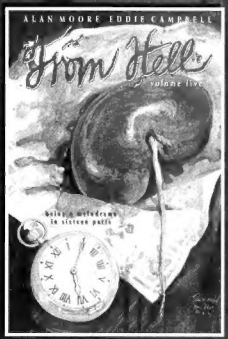
The summer was come now, and the gardener, an old sailor, made him a hammock and fixed it up for him in the branches of a weeping willow. And here for long hours he lay, hidden from anyone who might come to the vicarage, reading, reading passionately. Time passed and it was July; August came: on Sundays the church was crowded with strangers, and the collection at the offertory often amounted to two pounds. Neither the Vicar nor Mrs. Carey went out of the garden much during this period; for they disliked strange faces, and they looked upon the visitors from London with aversion. The house opposite was taken for six weeks by a gentleman who had two little boys, and he sent in to ask if Philip would like to go and play with them; but Mrs. Carey returned a polite refusal. She was afraid that Philip would be corrupted by little boys from London. He was going to be a clergyman, and it was necessary that he should be preserved from contamination. She liked to see in him an infant Samuel.

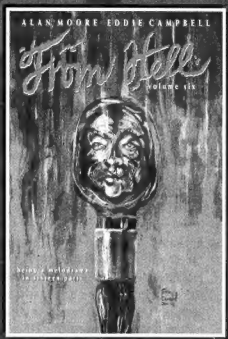
Last issue's excerpt: George Orwell,
Keep the Aspidistra Flying

POLITICS. CONSPIRACY. ROYALTY. MADNESS. MURDER.

From Hell

ALAN MOORE and EDDIE CAMPBELL'S AWARD-WINNING TALE OF JACK THE RIPPER.





WINNER of SIX HARVEY and EISNER AWARDS!

Available in finer comic shops, or for a free catalog featuring *From Hell* and other graphic novel masterpieces, call 1-800-672-7862, e-mail kitchensp@aol.com, fax 1-413-582-7116, or write Kitchen Sink Press, Inc., 320 Riverside Drive, Northampton, MA 01060.

T-SHIRT ALSO AVAILABLE

KITCHEN SINK PRESS

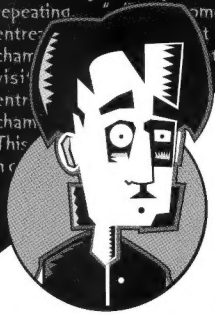
MAD LOVE

COMIC SHOP LOCATOR SERVICE 888-COMIC-BOOK 888-266-4226

Kitchen Sink Press and the Kitchen Sink Press logo are registered trademarks of Kitchen Sink Press, Inc. All rights reserved.

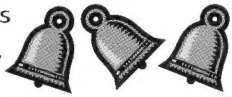
Poe

POE is an ongoing epic story detailing the adventures of Edgar Allan Poe.

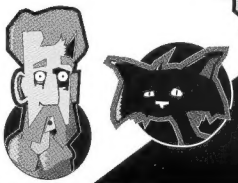


Join Edgar on his quest to find his lost Lenore.

Along the way, he experiences all of the fantastic adventures that he later becomes famous for writing...



...not to mention meeting a lot of strange people.



POE
is available
in fine comic
shops everywhere!
Or, write to:
Cheese Comics
P.O. Box 103
Oak Creek, WI 53154

What if CEREBUS *comics were forbidden?*

Outrageous? Sure it is, but the works of many comic book professionals have been seized and sometimes banned by the real life thought police.

The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund was founded to fight these threats. In the last five years, the CBLDF has spent over $200,000 defending First Amendment rights in the comic book industry. We have successfully defended or deterred over a dozen threats to comic book artists, publishers, and retailers from over-zealous police departments, prosecutors, and would-be censors.

Please help us continue our mission to fight censorship by making a donation. With your support, the CBLDF can continue to champion comic book professionals' freedom of speech. After all, it's the thought police that should be banned!

(clip and mail)

_____ Yes! I want to help fight censorship in the comic book industry. Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution of:

_____ $15 _____ $50
_____ $25 _____ other

Please add my name to your mailing list and send me more information:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State: _____ Zip: _____

THE COMIC BOOK LEGAL DEFENSE FUND

Mail donations and inquiries to:
CBLDF • P.O. Box 693
Northampton, MA 01061
1-800-992-2533
e-mail: 102437.1430@compuserve.com